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# Nature writing class

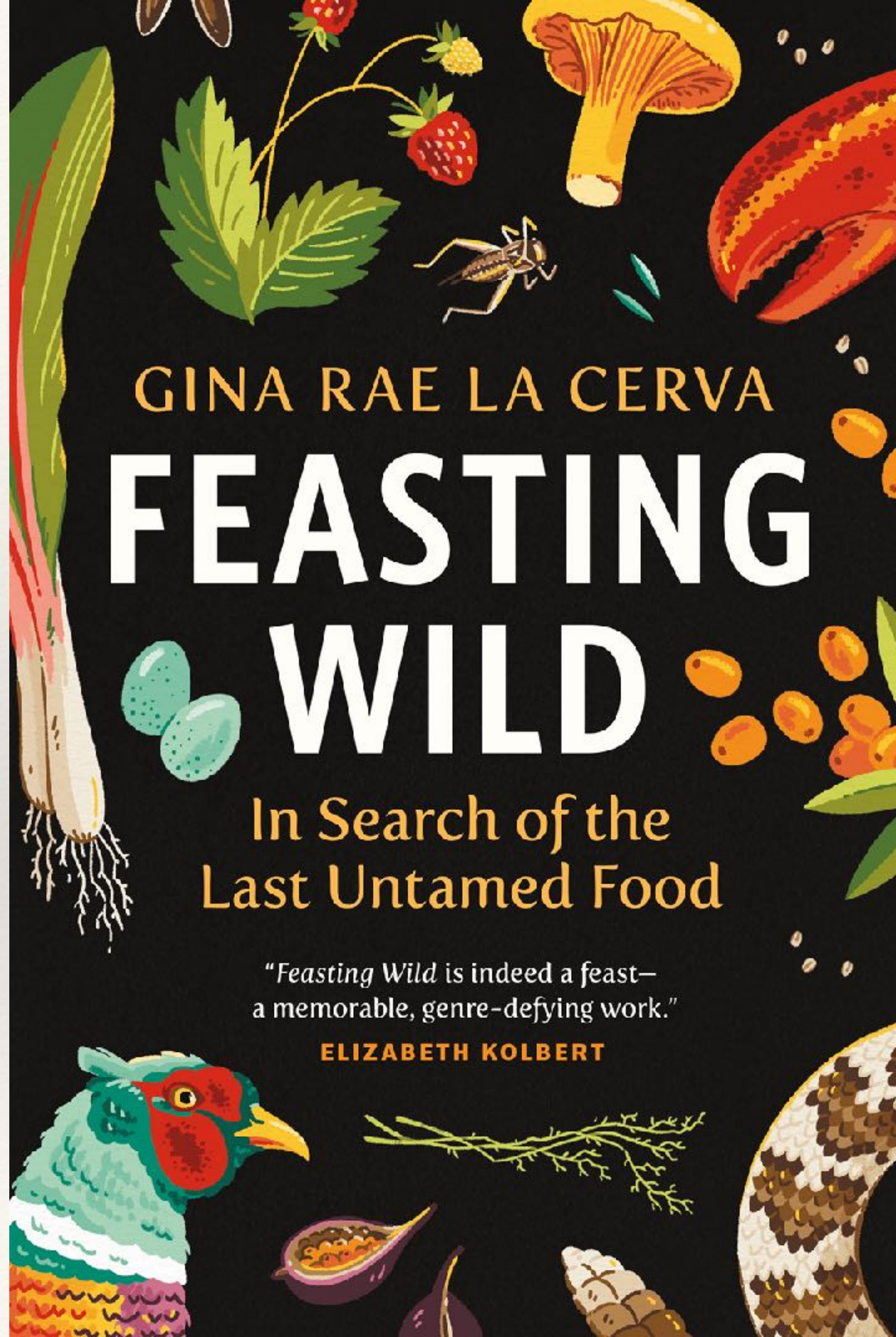
Gina Rae La Cerva

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## Land acknowledgement:

I am speaking to you today from the traditional lands of the Tewa and Tano people. This unceded territory is called O'gah'poh geh Owingeh (White Shell Water Place), or Santa Fe, New Mexico.





GINA RAE LA CERVA

# FEASTING WILD

In Search of the  
Last Untamed Food

"Feasting Wild is indeed a feast—  
a memorable, genre-defying work."

ELIZABETH KOLBERT

I am a geographer,  
environmental anthropologist,  
and the author of this book!



*I spent many years researching it—all around the world*





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# Overview:

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Introductions

Hunger

Pleasure

Imagination

Magic

Discussion



Rage, grief, hunger, desire, gratitude, awe. The emotions we feel about the living world and our place in it are as vast and unwieldy as all rivers and forests, oceans and mountains.

So how do tap into these emotions to begin to to listen to the more-than-human world?

How do we understand Nature as having agency, life-histories, and desires?

How do we learn to see ourselves as wild nature too?

We are ourselves interspecies, carrying around bacteria and fungi and viruses. Every time we eat, it is an ecological act. We are eating entire environments embodied in our foods. We are eating the carbon cycle, the nutrient cycle, and the climate.



How can we rethink eating not just as consumption but as *reciprocity*?

How can we transform our grief over environmental destruction into living with more joy and purpose?

By using the ideas of hunger, pleasure, imagination, and magic, we will dive into what it means to “consume” nature, to “connect” with nature, and ultimately how to expand our perceptions to witness more of nature.



Let's take a deep breath!



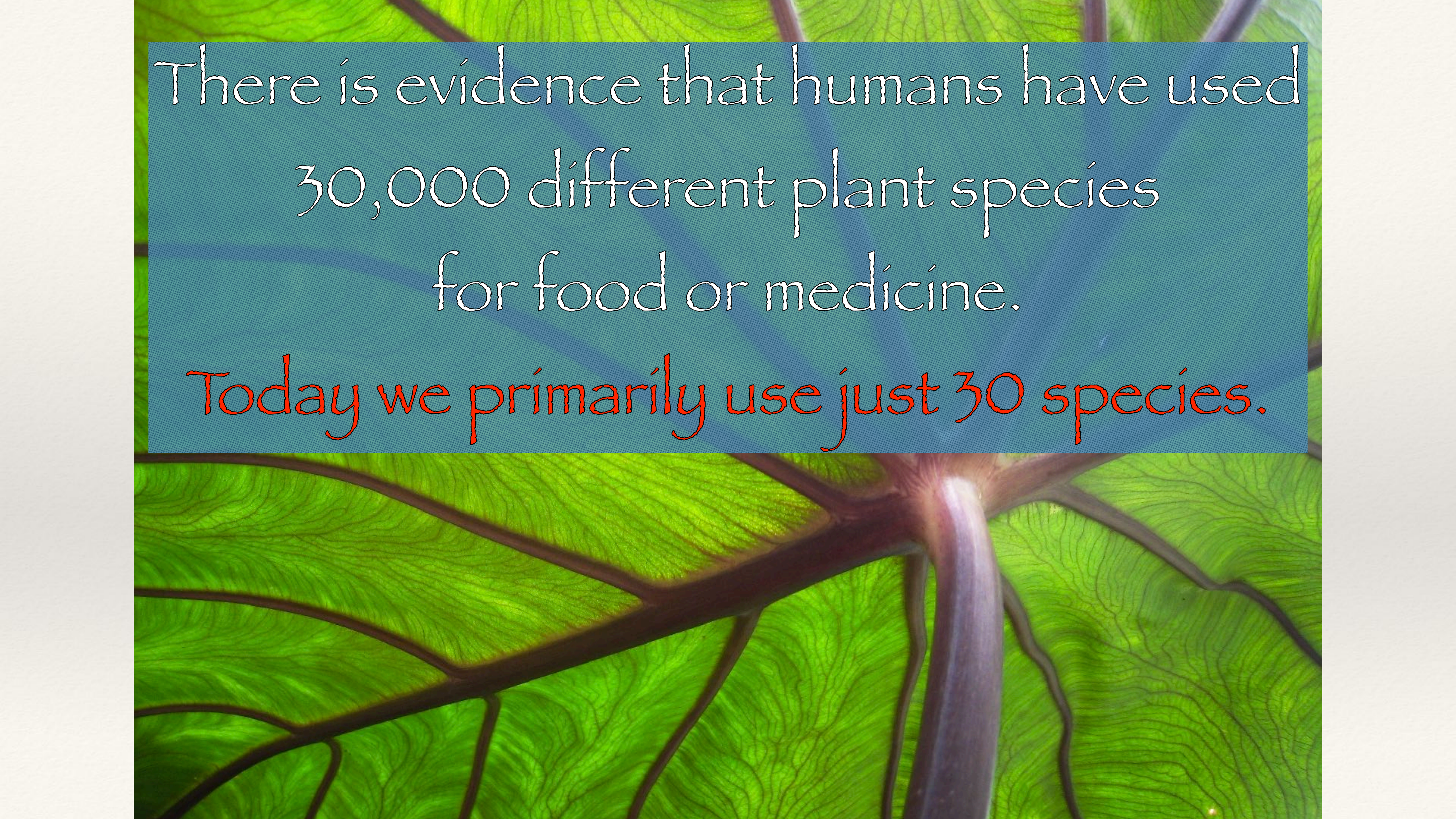
Hunger



“Then one day, walking along Tinker Creek, thinking of nothing at all, I saw it—the tree with the lights in it. It was the same backyard cedar where the mourning doves roost, only charged and transfigured, each cell buzzing with flame ... It was less like seeing than like being for the first time seen, knocked breathless by a powerful glance ... I had been my whole life a bell, and never knew it until at that moment I was lifted and struck.”

—Annie Dillard, *Pilgram at Tinker Creek*



A close-up photograph of green leaves, showing the intricate network of veins. The leaves are vibrant green, and the veins are a darker shade, creating a complex pattern. The lighting is soft, highlighting the texture of the leaf surfaces.

There is evidence that humans have used  
30,000 different plant species  
for food or medicine.

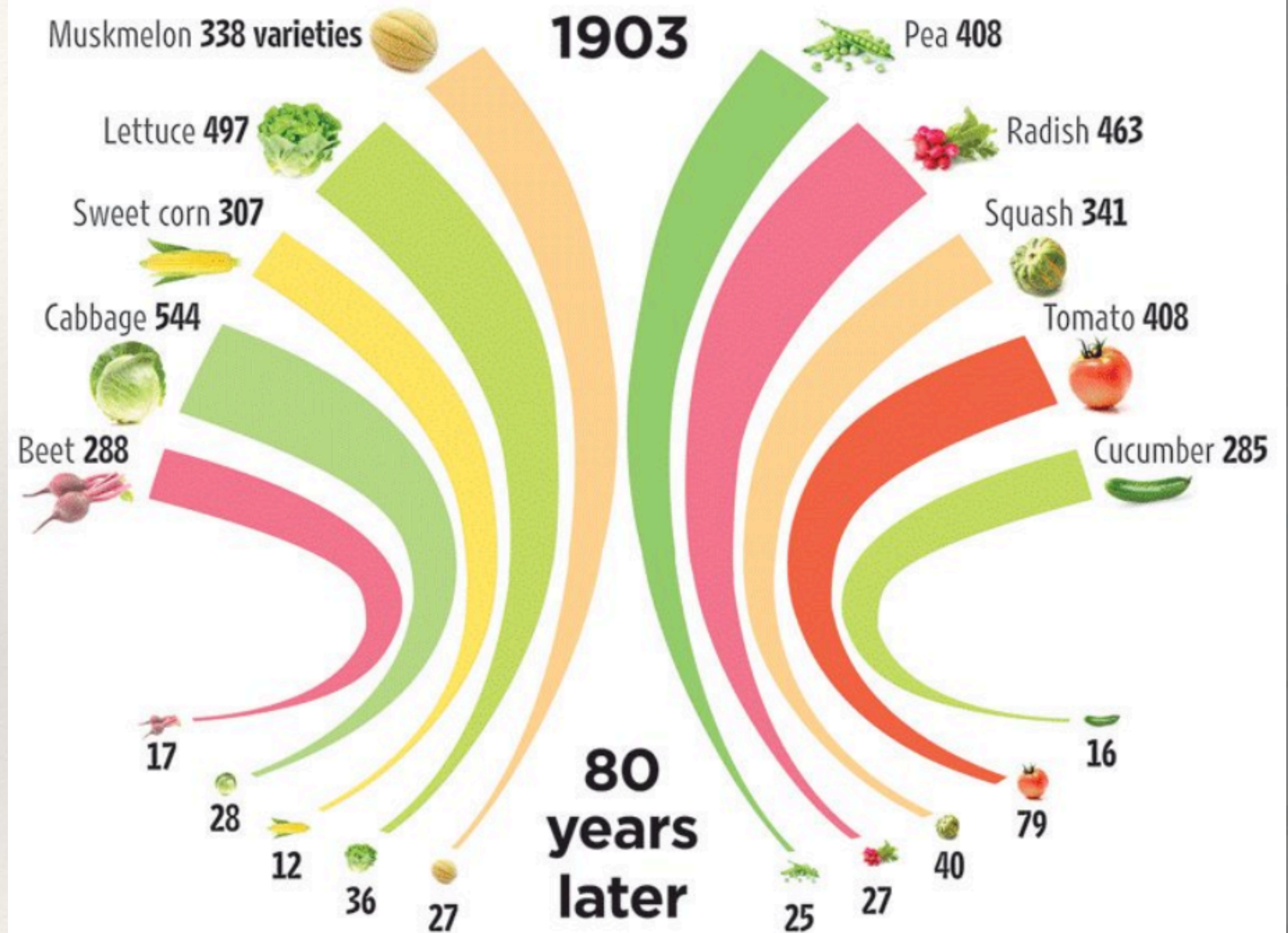
Today we primarily use just 30 species.



Sixty percent of our diet is made up of just three annual crops—rice, wheat, and corn. Eighty percent of our agricultural crops are annuals that must be ripped up and replanted each year.

## Our dwindling food variety

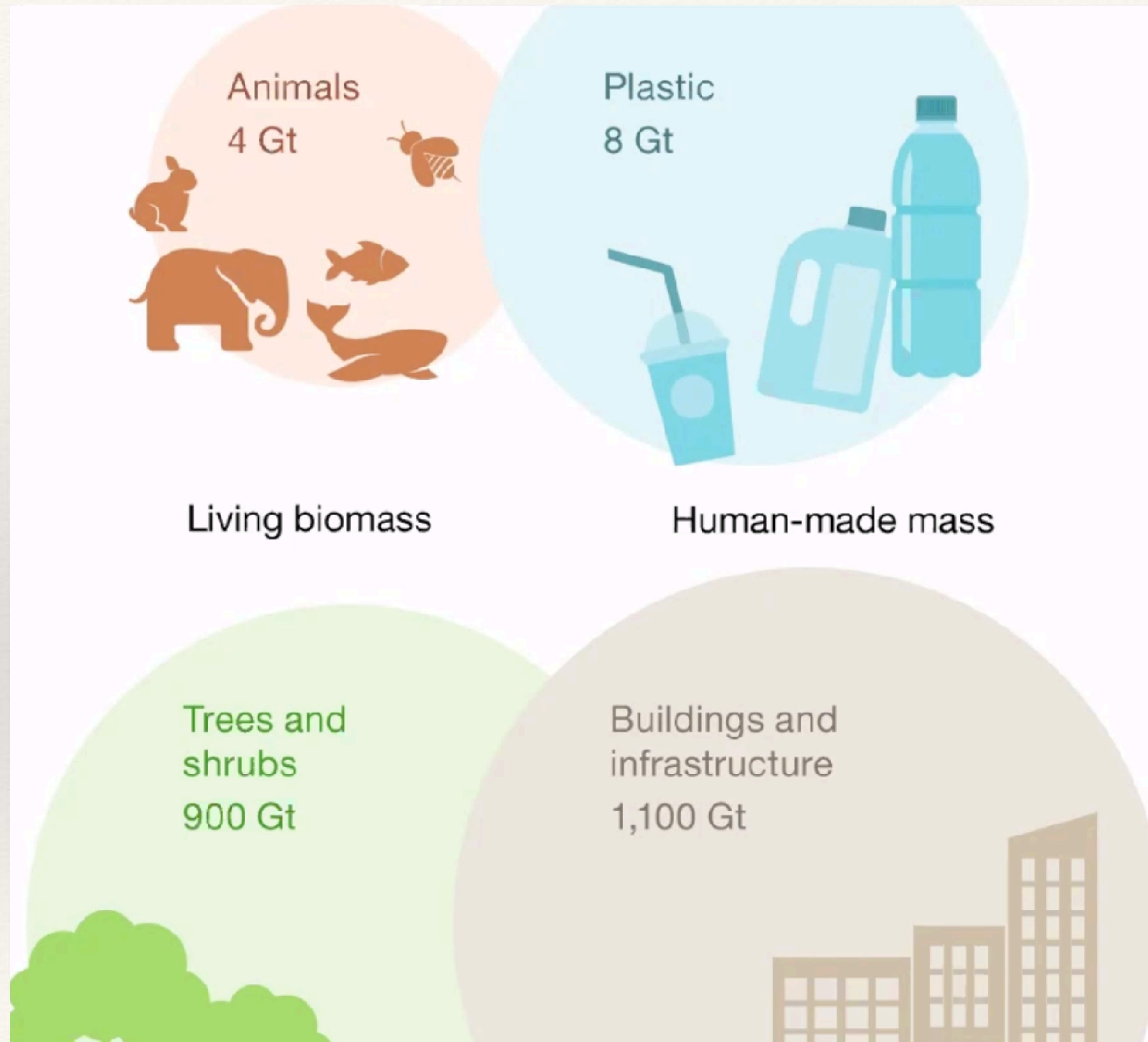
A little over a century ago, U.S. commercial seed houses offered hundreds of varieties, as shown in this sampling of ten crops.



Few of those varieties were found in the National Seed Storage Laboratory (now called the Center for Genetic Resources Preservation).



Human-made mass EXCEEDS all living biomass.



The quantity of stuff we make has been doubling every 20 years.

Elhacham et al. 2020, *Nature*



Free-write for ten minutes:

What do you hunger for the most?

Is it a self-imposed hunger?

What other emotions come up when you think about this hunger? Rage? Grief?  
Longing? Nostalgia?

Is there a memory from the past that may have contributed to these feelings?

How does this hunger change with the seasons?



Pleasure



“There is another, inner way, a way that is not accessible to everyone. It leads from the unconscious within ourselves to the imponderable and invisible in the earthly environment. It is this way which binds the artist to the world. He who walks this trail sees the beauty of the earth, and hears its music.

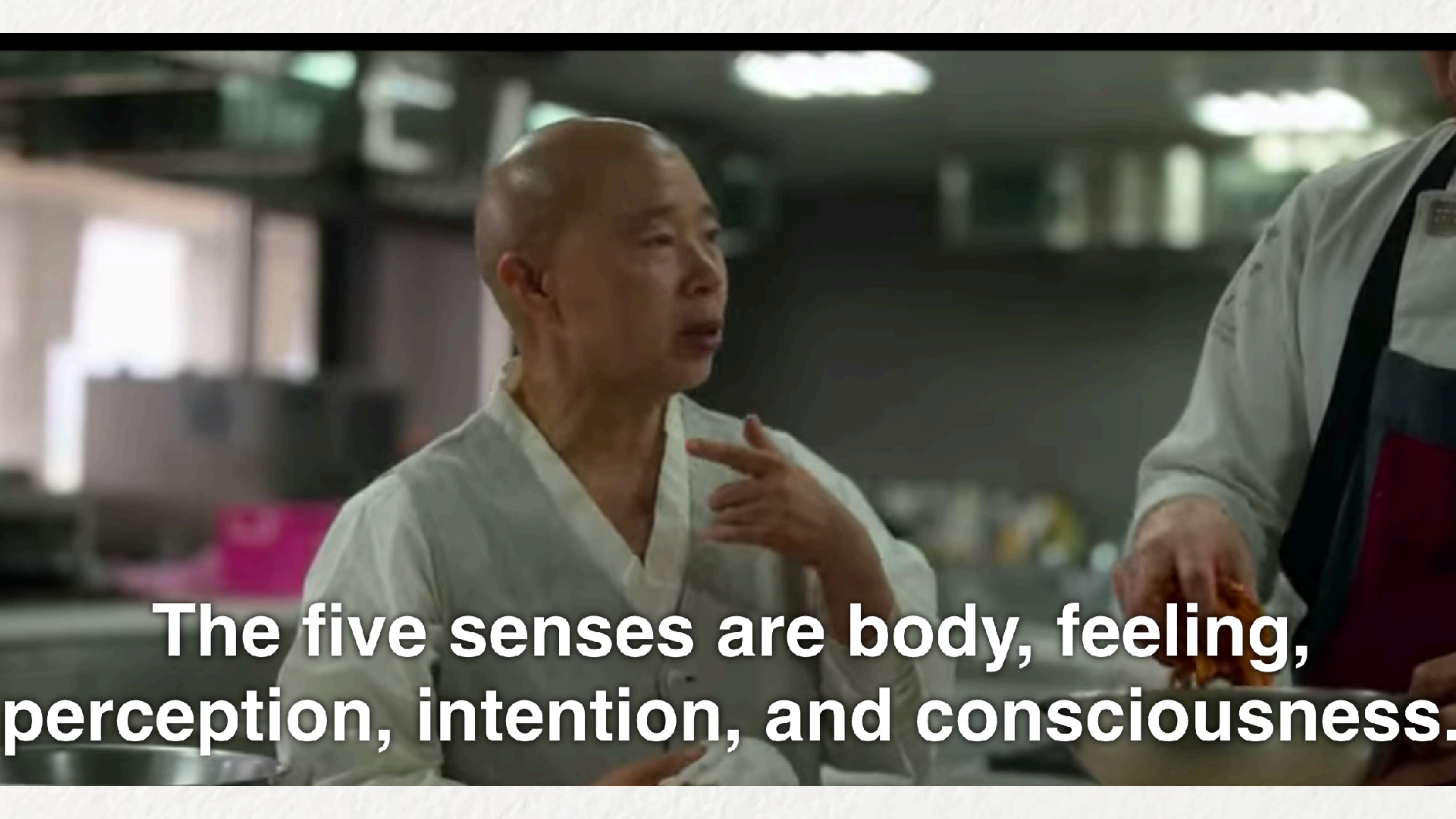
Why does man find beauty in a landscape? Is it not because he is a part of nature, inwardly subject to nature’s laws, because he has an unconscious insight into the internal order of the earth, into the rhythm of its repetitions, the harmony of its lines and surfaces and the balanced interplay of its parts? And does not our delight in the contemplation of nature **grow out of the harmony between the music of our own soul and the music of the earth?”**”

*–Hans Cloos, Conversations with Earth*







A Buddhist monk with a shaved head, wearing a white robe, is speaking to a chef in a kitchen. The chef is wearing a white shirt and a dark apron. The monk is gesturing with his right hand. The background is a kitchen with various equipment and lights.

**The five senses are body, feeling, perception, intention, and consciousness.**







## Free-write for ten minutes:

Write about an encounter with nature that you've had in a pleasurable and sensual way.

Can you recall a moment where you felt or witnessed the eroticism of nature?

What were *all* your senses doing?

Can you describe the aromas and physical sensations you experienced?

Can you make the reader salivate?



Imagination



“We may acknowledge, intellectually, our body’s reliance upon those plants and animals that we consume as nourishment, yet the civilized mind still feels itself somehow separate, autonomous, independent of the body and of bodily nature in general. Only as we begin to notice and to experience, once again, our immersion in the invisible air do we start to recall what it is to be fully a part of this world... This breathing landscape is no longer just a passive backdrop against which human history unfolds, but a potentized field of intelligence in which our actions participate.”

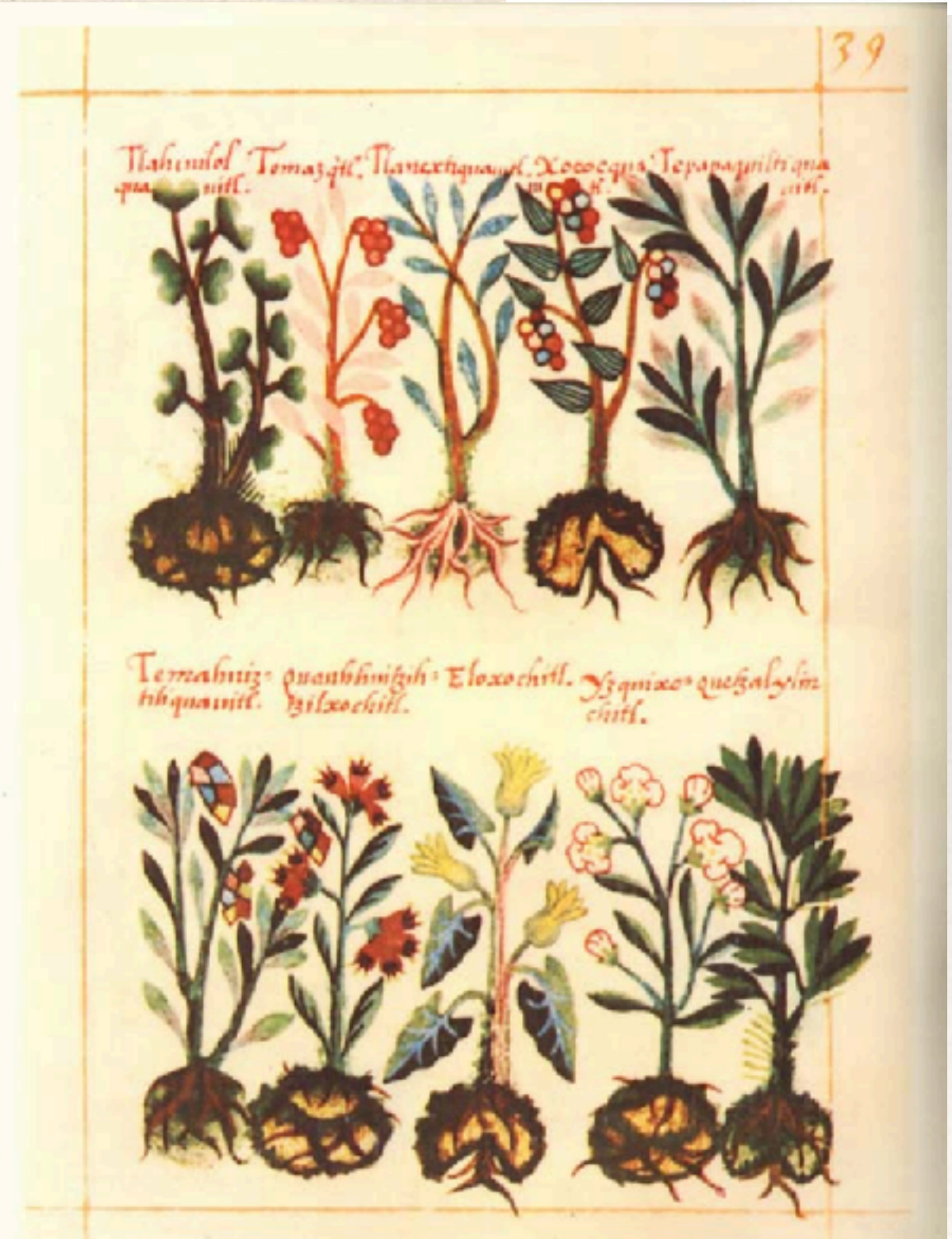
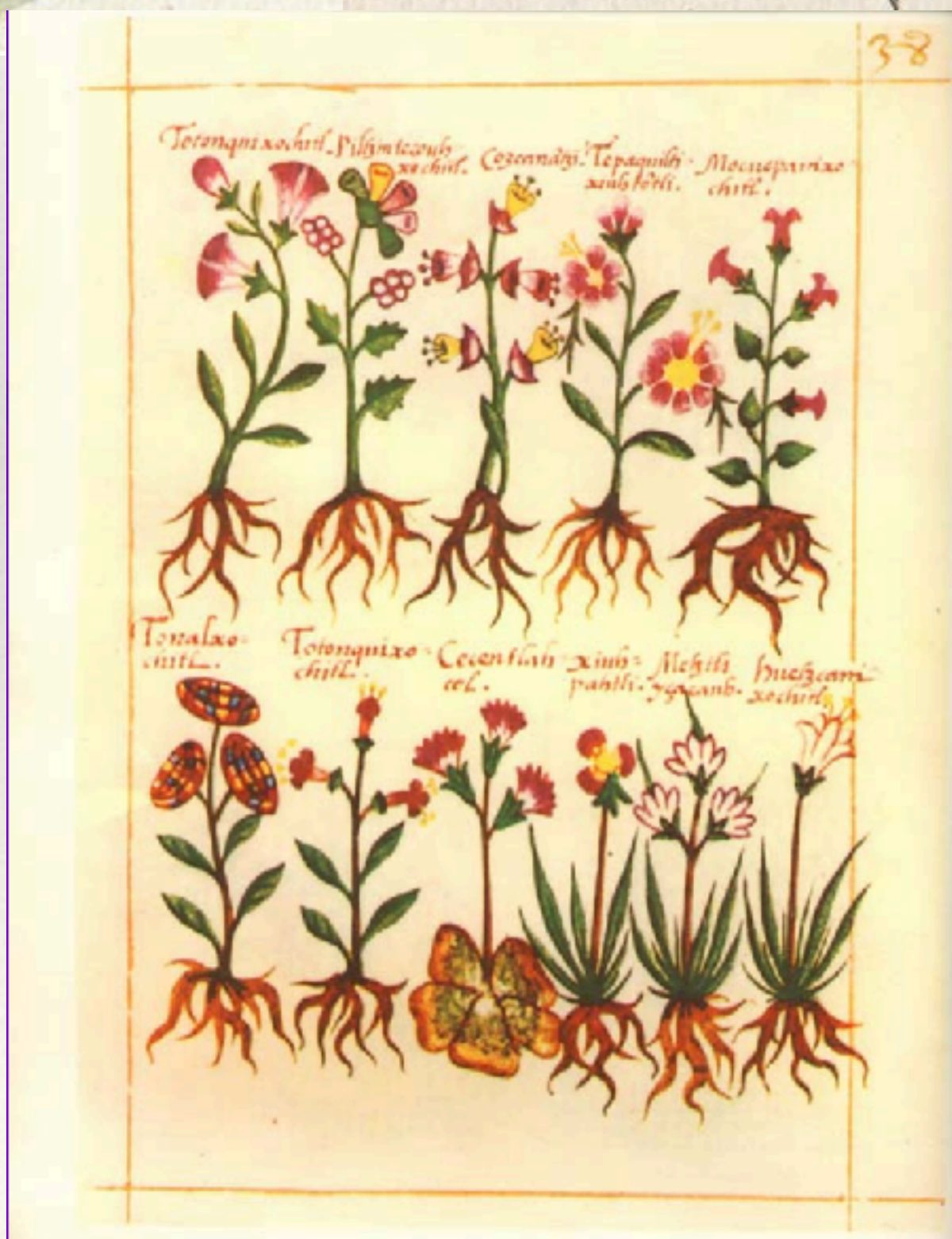
–David Abrams, *The Spell of the Sensuous*





Doctrine of Signatures





Codex Badiano 1552







## Free-write for ten minutes:

If you could eat anywhere right now, where would it be? What kind of imaginary meal would you enjoy?

Imagine a *reciprocal* way of eating.

What does that look like for you? How would food be cultivated and consumed? What kind of rituals would we have? What roles would justice play? What about pleasure?

What would be our relationship to the creatures we eat? To our ancestors? And children?

How do we cultivate abundance, stewardship, and mutual thriving?

What is stopping us from creating this fabulous dinner party?



Magic



“There is no system, only practice.”

–Thomas Hauschild, *Power and Magic in Italy*









**Talk dirty to me**

**There are more living organisms in one tablespoon of soil than there are people on earth**

@theoxygenproj

- 70,000 Different types of soil in the U.S.
- 5,000 Different types of bacteria in one gram of soil.
- 1,400,000 Earthworms that can be found in an acre of cropland







Free-write for twenty minutes:

Write about yourself. Describe yourself, your surroundings, your frame of mind, your emotional state, but write it all in the third person (he/she/they, *not* I/me).

**Write it as if the earth were writing your autobiography.**

What might that viewpoint notice?

Will that *voice* talk about the bacteria in your belly or the fungus on your skin?

What about the forest where the oxygen you breath was renewed?

What are the pleasures you experience as a human being when witnessed from the lens of nature?



## A Note on Sharing

We are not critiquing, we are just responding to the heart of what each person is sharing.

Share something you have written today, or talk about how you feel and what memories arose for you.

We are all practicing vulnerability here!





[www.ginaraelc.com](http://www.ginaraelc.com)

Instagram: @feastingwild



Thank you!

